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ABSTRACT

To measure the effectiveness of the computer based instructional system designed to develop the writing and reading skills of kindergarten and first grade students, Writing to Read (WTR), which was implemented by three Kettering (Ohio) Elementary Schools in 1988 and three more in 1989, was examined in five areas related to the program. Results indicated: (1) first graders' attitudes and feelings about WTR were generally positive; (2) the majority of parents were pleased with the program and feeling it should continue; (3) WTR teachers were concerned about implementation problems as well as with a readiness/development issue; (4) a comparison of the reading and language scores of second graders, who had or had not participated in the WTR program as first graders, taken from the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, found the WTR mean higher than the non-WTR (NWTR) mean; and (5) in 1988-89 there was a significant Reading Total difference between the WTR and NWTR subgroups with significant differences also in Language Mechanics, Language Expression, and Language Totals. (NH)

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Summary of the Report on the Review of the Writing to Read
Program as Implemented in the Kettering City Schools
During the 1988-1989 School Year

August, 1989

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I. Purpose and Scope of the Formative Evaluation Study

This is the second year of the formative evaluation study of Writing to Read program as implemented in the Kettering City Schools. Three more schools participated in Writing to Read this year in addition to the three existing programs. The levels of implementation in each school varies with the number of years the program has been available, i.e. some schools have used it with kindergarten students only this year while other schools have students currently in the third grade that had Writing to Read in the first grade. Throughout the document, these differences are noted.

This study examined five different areas related to the Writing to Read program. **AREA ONE** represents the response of the first grade students to a questionnaire focused on their attitudes and feelings about Writing to Read as they experienced it during the first part of the school year. **AREA TWO** focuses on the response of parents to a questionnaire soliciting their opinions about Writing to Read <WTR> based on the information they received through the school and from their children. **AREA THREE** includes a survey of the first grade and kindergarten teachers participating in the Writing to Read program during the 1988-1989 school year. **AREA FOUR** represents a comparison of the reading and language scores from the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills administered to second graders in the winter of 1989. This student group represented a comparison sample of students that participated in the Writing to Read program <WTR> as first graders in 1987-1988 and those students that did not participate in the Writing to Read program <NWTR>. **AREA FIVE** is a comparison of the ratings on the Competency Based Writing Samples given to first and second graders in the Kettering City Schools in the spring of 1989. Two groups are represented in this rating comparison, i.e. those students who participated in Writing to Read <WTR> and those students who did not participate in Writing to Read <NWTR>.

Kettering elementary schools participating in Writing to Read:

1987-1988

Bevertown
Kennedy
Southdale

1988-1989

Beavertown
Greenmont
Indian Riffle
Kennedy
Prass <Kindergarten only>
Southdale

II. The Writing to Read Program as Implemented in Kettering

The Writing to Read program is a computer based instructional system designed to develop the writing and reading skills of kindergarten and first grade students. Some of the features listed as learning outcomes for students include (Butzin, 1989, 1984):

- A. learning the alphabetic principle which lets them write anything they can say
- B. use of a consistent, phonetic spelling system
- C. use of the computer as a guide and a tutor
- D. feel in command of the computer
- E. discovering the joy of language
- F. developing an ability to express ideas and to manipulate the English language

According to John Martin, one of the founders of Writing to Read, writing skills developed by students lead them to reading. In this program students combine sounds and the representative letters that stand for sounds into words that they know through their speaking vocabulary. The reading act for these writers involves reading the words, sentences, and stories that they have written. Writing becomes a part of listening, reading, speaking, i.e. personal communication. Accordingly, the Writing to Read program progresses logically from what the students can say to what the students can write and read.

Martin and Friedberg (1986) stated that students enter school as primary verbal communicators with a speaking vocabulary of more than 2000 words. Students become active participants in learning through writing and reading their phonetic spelling system. These students also learn better and retain more when a multisensory approach is used in the learning process. Students have more success when the program is designed around the way they learn. Students also learn better when they are reinforced in a variety of ways by peers, teachers, and parents.

Charp (1989) states that IBM says that more than one million children in 5,000 kindergarten and first-grade classrooms are using Writing to Read as a multi-component computer-based system. She reported after visiting 30 inner-city, suburban, public and private schools and talking with more than 200 district staff, teachers, teacher aides, parents, and children in these programs that students can handle the technology <IBM computers, tape recorders, etc.> as well as the movement from station to station.

The Writing to Read software and other support materials help students work through sequenced, self-paced computer word cycles designed to teach letter-sound relationships (Spillman and Lutz, 1986). The Writing to Read program is organized around five major work stations. These centers are as follows:

Computer Station: This station provides the initial instruction in the letter and sound relationships.

Work Journal Station: At this station students practice the letter and sound relationships in addition to making words related to these letters.

Writing/Typing Station: Students write/type/word process stories that they wrote.

Listening Library: Students listen to tapes of books on a variety of topics.

Make Words Station: This station has a variety of different learning activities related to letter sounds and words.

As Writing to Read is implemented in Kettering, the number of schools using this program in kindergarten and first grade has increased. Three schools were involved in the Writing to Read program during the 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 school years. These schools were Beavertown, Kennedy, and Southdale. During the 1988-1989 school year, three more schools were added. Greenmont and Indian Riffle used the Writing to Read program with kindergarten and first grade students and Prass used it with kindergarten students only.

In the implementation of the Writing to Read program, students spend approximately one hour per day in the "Writing to Read Room", circulating among the five stations every fifteen to twenty minutes. Students are encouraged to create stories without an emphasis on the traditional aspects of spelling. Children freely compose stories and during the revision process correct spelling may be emphasized. Computers in the Writing to Read program serve as both motivators and initiators of the writing experience in addition to being drill master, monitor, reward giver, and diagnostician for the students. The teacher is free to guide the students and give them encouragement and assistance in composing, as well as thinking about ideas to incorporate in their stories (Spillman and Lutz, 1986). This approach is called Language-Experience, i.e. anything students can write about, they can also read. Through this multisensory process in the Writing to Read program, students gain more confidence in their own abilities to write, spell, and read.

III. Conclusion

The Conclusions from the formative study of Writing to Read in the Kettering City Schools is as follows:

A. AREA ONE: Responses from the first grade students 1988-1989

1. The formative evaluation study done in 1987-1988 and this study indicated that the Writing Table Station and the Word Processing Station, i.e. the one conducted by the teacher where the students' stories are word processes, are the ones most highly preferred by the students.
2. The majority of open ended responses by the students in formative evaluation were positive about the Writing to Read program in both studies.

B. AREA TWO: Parental Responses

3. The formative evaluation study done in 1987-1988 and this study indicate that the majority of parents are pleased with the Writing to Read program and they felt that it should be continued.
4. Most parents felt that their child "liked WTR very much".

C. AREA THREE: Response of Writing to Read teachers

5. Similar statements about individual attention, creative writing opportunities, the introduction to computers and word processors were mentioned in the 1987-1988 study and by teacher respondents in this study.
6. Implementation problems related to scheduling WTR times around other programs and general class activities was listed in each study.
7. The readiness/developmental issue was raised by the teachers in each study.

D. AREA FOUR: Analysis of the Second Grade CTBS Results for WTR and NWTR Students

8. Comparing the results of the 1987 - 1988 CTBS Writing to Read analysis and the analysis in this report indicated that some of the differences between WTR and NWTR still existed in the 1988-1989 group of second graders. In the WORD

ATTACK, VOCABULARY, READING, COMPREHENSION, and SPELLING areas of the CTBS, the second graders in 1987-1988 and 1988-1989 showed significant differences in the **WTR** and **NWTR** groups. In all cases the **WTR** mean was higher than the **NWTR** mean for these subtests on the CTBS.

9. In the 1987-1988 school year **READING TOTAL** did not represent a significant difference between **WTR** and **NWTR** second grade students and in the 1988-1989 school year there was a significant difference between the **WTR/NWTR** subgroups. Significant differences between **WTR** and **NWTR** 1987-1988 second grade students were found in **LANGUAGE MECHANICS, LANGUAGE EXPRESSION, and LANGUAGE TOTALS** while in the 1987-1988 second grade group these differences were not seen between **WTR** and **NWTR** students.
10. In terms of differences between the males and females in **WTR** and **NWTR** program and scores on the CTBS the following subtests indicated a **WTR** and sex interaction, i.e. **WTR** males and females scored higher than **NWTR** males and females for the 1988-1989 group of second grade students. The 1988-1989 CTBS Areas where **WTR/NWTR** and sex differences were statistically significant different are as follows:

**WORD ATTACK
VOCABULARY
READING TOTALS
SPELLING**

11. Comparing the 1988-1989 second grade CTBS results to the 1987-1988 results indicated the sex differences with in the **WTR** and **NWTR** groups were continuous for both years in these areas:

**WORD ATTACK
VOCABULARY
SPELLING**

E. AREA FIVE: Analysis of the Average Rating and Word Production for the Competency Based Writing Samples

12. The quantitative results for **AREA FIVE** on the comparison of the average word and rating measures on the Competency Based Writing samples for first and second grade students during the 1988-1989 school year indicated differences between the **WTR** and **NWTR** groups of students at both grade levels.
13. The number of words produced on the Competency Based Writing sample for 1988-1989 group represents a measure of writing fluency that is related to the objectives stated for the Writing to Read program. For both first and second grade students there was a statistically significant difference between the **WTR** and **NWTR** students with the **WTR** students scoring higher.
14. The mean rating on the Competency Based Writing sample for 1988-1989 is related to the scale used by the Kettering City Schools to determine levels of writing competency. For both the first and second grade students there was a statistically significant difference between the **WTR** and **NWTR** groups with the **WTR** students scoring higher.
15. There were also sex differences seen in the **WTR** and **NWTR** groups. Males and females in the **WTR** groups produced more words at higher ratings on the Competency Based Writing sample than males and females in the **NWTR** group.

IV. Recommendations by Area

A. AREA ONE: Student Responses to Writing to Read

The following recommendations are based on the information from student questionnaire responses from first grade students in the **WTR** program.

1. The materials used in the Make Words Station, Listening Lab, and Work Journal need to be closely examined to see if they meet the learning potential/learning style. These stations were rated by the students as "not as preferred" as the other station options.

2. An examination of selected student's writing patterns in the Writing to Read program, i.e. a longitudinal examination of a selected sample of kindergarten students as they progress through the Writing to Read program in kindergarten, first grade, and into second grade would reveal more specific information about phonetic spelling transitions, informational content of writing, etc.

B. AREA TWO: Parent Questionnaire Information

The following recommendation is based on the information from the parent questionnaire responses.

3. The parent questionnaire administration should continue for parents of kindergarten and first grade students because many of those responding in the 1987-1988 and in 1988-1989 surveys were parents who had children in the Kettering City Schools for the first time.

C. AREA THREE: WTR Teacher Responses

The following recommendations are based on the information gained from the responses of the **WTR** kindergarten and first grade teachers.

4. Scheduling the Writing to Read lab time seems to be a building specific issue. Teachers might benefit from sharing how they implement the schedule and use remedial and/or enrichment activities in their classrooms.
5. The scope of the survey needs to be expanded to gather more information from teachers with a growing base of **WTR** experiences.
6. Teachers and administrators need to examine the readiness/developmental issue for some kindergarten and first graders to see what instructional options may be designed to meet the readiness/developmental concerns.

D. AREA FOUR: CTBS Score Comparison of WTR and NWTR Students

7. As long as there are schools where second grade students have not had **WTR**, continue to examine the CTBS scores for areas of differences in subtests.

8. As soon as the individual schools using **WTR** have students in the grade level where **CTBS** testing is repeated, perform the same type of **CTBS** subtest analysis for the **WTR** and **NWTR** groups to determine if differences still exist between the groups.

E. AREA FIVE: Comparison of First and Second Grade Students Competency Based Writing Samples.

The following recommendations are based on the results of comparing first and second grade students rating and word production on the Competency Based Writing samples during the 1988-1989 school year.

9. Continue to monitor the results of the Competency Based Writing sample average word count and rating results as long as there are **WTR** and **NWTR** groups available.

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